News release

Met Office joins energy industry in pioneering study on climate change impacts

5 June 2006

The Met Office and a group of leading energy companies has announced the findings today (5 June 2006) of a new study into climate change and its potential impacts on the UK energy industry.

In a landmark collaboration, the nation's weather experts have teamed up with E.ON UK, EDF Energy and the National Grid to use climate predictions, created by the Met Office's Hadley Centre, to understand how climate change will affect future energy use and demand and what further information the industry may need to adapt to those changes.

The scoping study report, revealed today at a press conference attended by Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks at the Institute of Engineering and Technology in London, gives some initial indications on how climate change could impact the industry over the next century. It also identifies areas requiring further research which will help guide any wider studies in the future.

The venture is the first nationwide attempt to identify how climate change will affect energy generation, distribution and transmission as well as demand. The study also aims to identify any positive impacts of changes to our climate.

Factors taken into account have included how climate change could affect energy demand through population growth and movement, greater use of air conditioning and effects on the performance of generating plant.

Speaking at the event, Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks said:

"We quite rightly talk a lot about what we can do to mitigate climate change, and the energy sector has been in the forefront of our efforts. However the world has no choice but to start planning for the inevitability of some climate change. It is vital for the future of our society and economy that the energy sector is able to adapt to the effects of climate change and can continue to provide the power we need to maintain our way of life.

"This study is an important step towards planning for a future in which climate - both in terms of creeping changes of temperature and greater risk of extreme events - means that we have to operate in a very different world to the one we are familiar with today. Given the long lead times that the energy industry faces in making investment decisions I welcome the fact that the market is already taking very long-term steps to plan for an uncertain future."

The Chief Executive of the Met Office, Mark Hutchinson, said:

"The scientific consensus is that the global climate is changing. Many of the expected impacts, such as higher temperatures and changes to seasonal extremes, are already widely known. This study goes further by applying the Met Office's world-leading science to specific impacts across the energy industry.

"For example, we may experience changes in demand for winter heating and summer cooling. Crucially for the energy industry and ultimately their customers, current energy systems and processes may work less effectively as temperatures rise."

E.ON UK Chief Executive, Dr Paul Golby said:

"The study offers a unique window on the future.

"The energy industry's activities and markets are closely affected by the weather and would clearly be influenced by the effects of climate change, which is why we're keen to be involved with this important study.

"Bringing together the Met Office and leading energy players concentrates experience, knowledge and resources through which we can begin the process of assessing the impacts of climate change and how we need to respond to ensure viable, long-term energy supplies."

EDF Energy's Chief Executive Vincent de Rivaz said:

"I am delighted that EDF Energy has contributed to this valuable study.

"Climate change is a huge subject. This study benefits from the expertise and rigorous methodology used by the UK's weather experts and tries to identify the aspects of climate change which could have a real effect on our industry.

"But perhaps the most important issue to be reinforced by this study is the fact that we all need to play our part in adapting to climate change. This study focuses in on a very specific area - our industry and how it might be affected in years to come. It doesn't pretend to answer all the questions but it does point to the kind of issues that will become increasingly important for the energy industry and the areas we will need to address to make sure we keep the lights on."

Chris Murray, National Grid's Network Operations Director, said:

"Ensuring a safe, reliable and efficient supply of energy needs long-term planning, and essential for that is our ability to understand what the world will be like in the future. What environment will our infrastructure need to operate in? How will people live their lives and use energy? Climate change is likely to be a key factor here.

"Reducing our impact on climate change is a responsibility for everyone, especially for us in the energy industry, and I am proud that National Grid has already met the Kyoto target of 12% reduction in the UK and 8% reduction in the US, and we have committed to meeting the target of a 60% reduction in emissions across our operations before 2050. However, we need to face the reality that climate change will have an impact, and it is only by working together in ways like this that we can make sure we are ready to meet the challenges ahead."

The study aims to help energy companies plan for the future and could help shape all aspects of future energy provision and supply.

Those involved have ranked the impacts and how they could affect the industry in the long- and short-term, and have drawn up a priority list of areas requiring further detailed assessment.

The report has identified priorities for further investigation of the impact of climate change on the energy industry, hopefully involving a wider cross-section of stakeholders.

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